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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/30/2034
TAGS: PGOV PHUM ELAB ECON CH
SUBJECT: THE MAKINGS OF A CHINESE LABOR LAWYER

CLASSIFIED BY: MATTHEW D. MURRAY, ACTING POL/ECON CHIEF, US
CONSULATE SHANGHAI, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

11. (C) First-year labor law students in Suzhou shared their motivations for becoming labor lawyers with Poloff during a January 8 visit. The students from all over China had different reasons for pursuing their chosen field of study, ranging from aiding their own employment prospects during a period of economic turmoil to helping friends and relatives in their own hometowns be more aware of their rights when facing factory closures and salary cuts. It appeared that students from developed areas were more concerned with how their degree could help them, whereas poorer students appeared to have more altruistic goals. End Summary.

Next Generation of Labor Lawyers Weigh In

12. (C) Students at Suzhou University's Labor Law Center discussed labor issues with Poloff on January 8, offering their impressions of the current employment situation for both white and blue collar workers. Suzhou, located just outside Shanghai in relatively wealthy southeastern Jiangsu Province, boasts several high-quality universities, and students from all over China attend Suzhou University. The goal of the Suzhou University Law School's Labor Law Center is to give students hands-on practical experience by providing free labor advice to workers.

Some Students Motivated by Selfish Goals...

13. (C) The first-year law students at the Labor Law Center had varying reasons for pursuing labor law. One student from Jiangsu Province said he hopes earning a law degree will give him an advantage in a competitive job market. Another student from Nantong in Jiangsu Province told Poloff that in the current economic climate, it is especially difficult for qualified women to find good jobs, and she entered the labor law field because of her own previous job hunting experiences when she felt discriminated against because of her gender.

14. (C) Despite initially selfish goals, all three Jiangsu students said their experience at the Labor Law Center had helped them realize there are bigger problems in China. The student who wanted an advantage in the job market said he now believes that as difficult as it is for university graduates to find jobs, it is even harder for migrant workers. He said educating migrant workers about the Labor Contract Law (LCL), which went into force on January 1, 2008, helps him feel that he

is making a positive difference. The student concerned about gender discrimination agreed, stating that the Labor Law Center has helped her learn how to communicate with blue collar workers.

...Others More Altruistic

15. (C) Labor Law Center students from outside East China were not as preoccupied with their own job prospects, stating that they want to help blue collar workers in their own hometowns be more aware of their rights. A student from Hubei Province said he decided to pursue labor law after his father was fired unfairly and then rehired at a lower wage when his employer cut costs. He tearfully described the incident, saying that he felt "helpless" when his father called him to ask what to do. As the first member of his family to attend university, he said, his father's experience made him realize that he has a responsibility to learn as much as he can about labor law so that he can help others like his father.

16. (C) A student from a poor area in the southwestern part of Shandong Province said she is concerned about labor safety for blue collar workers in her hometown. She said her relatives in Hezi, Shandong Province are completely unaware of their rights. Similarly, a student from a poor northern part of Jiangsu Province near Taizhou who received his undergraduate degree from Shanxi University said he first became interested in labor law after reading about several coal mine accidents near Taiyuan, Shanxi's provincial capital. He now sees migrant workers losing their jobs in factories in Southern Jiangsu Province, and he is concerned about workers who do not receive all of their overtime pay or back wages.

Comment

17. (C) The roundtable discussion with labor law students provided interesting insights into the students' varying motivations for choosing labor law as their field of study, particularly in the context of China's economic downturn and concerns about social instability. As with so many things in China, it is difficult to generalize how or why students pursue a given career, but it is worth noting the differences in opinion between those students from more developed East China -- who appeared more concerned about themselves -- and those seemingly more altruistic students from poorer areas.

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